Growing Onions in the South.

Editor of The Progressive Farmer:

Years ago it was thought that onions could not be grown from the seed in the South in one season, as they are grown in the North, and it was the general practice to depend on sets purchased from the North for growing the crop. It is now known that fully as good crops of onions may be grown in one season in the South as in the North, and that the use of sets is only necessary for fall planting to grow early grown onions for bunching.

The difficulty formerly encountered in the growing of onions in the South came from too close following of the directions of Northern writers on gardening and ignoring the fact that the onion needs cool weather for its development. Seed sown in the South at the time recommended by the Northern writers will make sets, but not good onions, since the plants are overtaken by the hot weather and ripen up before fully grown.

VARIETIES OF ONIONS.

In the growing of onions we must also understand the differences between the various classes of onions grown. The Spanish and Italian varieties have been developed in warm climates and will grow to a larger size in the South than others developed in colder climates. The only difficulty with these is that they must be disposed of early in the summer, as they are all poor keepers. A difference, too, should be made in the manner of growing them. Some years ago a Northern garden writer advocated what he called the new onion culture. This is simply the sowing of the seed in winter under glass and transplanting early in the spring in the permanent location. Experiments have shown that while this method is well suited to the Spanish and Italian varieties, it makes little difference with the American sorts that are grown so largely for market. The Prize-taker a large yellow Spanish onion, succeeds best by the transplanting method. Here we sow the seed in a cold frame protected by glass sashes in early January. By carefully hardening off the plants and gradually exposing them to the air, they can be set in the open ground the latter part of February. The bed is carefully prepared in the fall and well manured with stable manure, to which is added at rate of a ton per acre, a mixture of 900 pounds of acid phosphate, 700 pounds of dried blood and 400 pounds of muriate of potash. This is well mixed with the soil early in September, and the first of October the bed is planted to lettuce. It is necessary to apply the fertilizer with so large a percentage of potash in it nearly a month before planting, so that the caustic nature of the potash may not injure the roots of the lettuce. The lettuce is cut and sold by the first week in January, and the frame is then used for the onion seed without any further fertlization.

The land into which the plants are to be set should be plowed well in the fall, and will be all the better is of a sandy loam character. In February it is replowed and put in fine order. If the crop is grown on a large scale the rows should be wide enough for horse culture, say two and a half feet. Run out furrows and apply in them 1,000 pounds per acre of the same fertilizer mixture advised for the lettuce. Turn two furrows over the first one, making a ridge. Roll this down nearly level and set the plants three inches apart in the row, only fairly covering the roots and bulk, so that the onion; when formed, will be on the general surface of the soil. In this way the Prizetaker onion can be grown as large as the imported ones found in crates in the stores. Of course the cleanest of culture must be adopted and the earth pulled away from the bulbs as they enlarge so that the bulb forms on top of the ground. An onion entirely in the ground will not attain the size of one sitting on the surface.

As I have said, this crop needs to be disposed of early, as this variety will not keep well. But coming into market at a time when ripe onions are scarce, they usually bring a fancy price. In fact, the imported Spanish-grown ones retail at the stores for five cents each, and fully as large ones can be grown here in a suitable soil and with culture.

For an onion crop to cure and keep, we must adopt a different method. I would promise that the onion is different from many other crops in the fact that it likes to be kept on the same land year after year, and no matter how well the soil is prepared or how highly fertilized, the first crop grown on it will not be as large as subsequent crops on the same land if the fertlization is kept up annually, and a crop of cow-peas is grown on the land after the onions are off and turned under in the late fall. By following this plan, and with liberal use of fertilizers, the onion crop will increase in amount year after year.

THE IMPORTANT POINTS.

The important points to be observed are early sowing and the use of the right varieties. Onions like a light sandy soil, and such a soil in the South can be worked at any time in winter. In the first place see to the seed. Get seed from a reliable dealer and be sure that it is fresh, for onion seed lose their vitality very rapidly after they are a year old. Prepare the land as advised for the transplanted onions and make the rows in the same way and use the same amount of fertilizer. The seed can be sown on the flattened ridges with garden seed drill. The best of all onions for this crop we have found, by careful experiment with a number of varieties, is the Southport White Globe. A round onion always measures better and yields heavier than a flat one. This variety of onions is as round as a base-ball and of an attractive collor.

FERTILIZING.

Sow the seed as early as practicable in February, so that the crop will have as long a period of cool weather in which to make its growth as possible, for when the great heat of the late June comes here, they will ripen and stop growing, hence they must be made before that time. The same clean culture and the same pulling away of the earth as the bulbs form, as advised for the transplanted crop, must be used. It will be far better if the large amount of fertilizer used be applied several weeks before planting. I have advised dried blood as a source of ammonia, because if cottonseed meal be used, the amount must be increased to get the large percentage of ammonia needed and the cottonseed meal has a dangerous fashion of causing a mould growth that destroys seeds and plants in contact with it. I once lost nearly my entire crop of frame lettuce from using cottonseed meal heavily. It made a fungus that caused the plants to rot off at the surface. Dried blood is better and has a higher percentage of ammonia. During the growth of the crop, an application of nitrate of soda alongside the rows will help greatly, for the manurial needs of the onion crop are mainly for nitrogen and potash.

Now a word as to curing and keeping onions. Pull them when the tops turn yellow and let them lie a day or so in the sun, but not in any rain, put into the warmest place at hand. Upon the roof of a barn is a good place to cure them. Keep the tops on and never remove them till you are going to sell or use them, as they keep better with the tops on. When perfectly dry remove them to a cool place and spread them out. A little freezing in winter will do less harm than a warm place to keep them after curing. I have kept them on a barn floor all winter. For a yellow onion, use the New Opal, which is one of the best keepers. For a red onion, the Wethersfield red is as good as any.

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Mr. B. S. Montford, of New Hanover County, has been spending some time in Monroe with his sister, Mrs. Antoinette Beasely. Mr. Montford is a truck farmer, located five miles from Wilmington. "I had a lettuce bed in the early spring," said he, "comprising less than one-eighth of an acre. I sold the lettuce from it for $125, shipping it to Philadelphia. On less than two acres, embracing this bit, I then planted Irish potatoes, selling my crop for $120, most of which was also shipped to Philadelphia. On the same ground I then planted corn." That is the way the truck growers of the East farm, and that section is destined to become very rich.—Monroe Journal.

"What we require," said the managing editor, "is the services of a man capable of taking full charge of our 'Query Box.' Are you capable of answering all kinds of questions?" Well, I rather guess so," replied the applicant. "I'm the father of eleven children."—Chicago News.

Buying Cheap Seeds is "Penny Wise, Pound Foolish."

The new and enlarged seed-testing laboratory at Washington conducted by the Government is a busy institution this season. Dr. Frederick V. Coville says that the use of poor seed causes a loss of many millions of dollars annually to American farmers. The Government is making extensive tests of seeds so that agriculturists may buy to advantage and plant with foreknowledge. Those who have no facilities at home for determining the value of seeds may send samples to Washington, where they will be tested in the laboratory and reports forwarded to the farmer.

The price of seed by the pound or bushel is by no means a criterion of value, for, aside from the introduction of noxious weeds from impure consignments, the loss in time, labor and crop returns by planting infertile seeds is sometimes very great. In one instance a farmer paid $3.50 for a bushel of clover seed, weighing sixty pounds; he thought he was getting it cheap. Laboratory tests showed that he had only twenty-seven and three-quarter pounds of good seed; the rest would not germinate and was of course a dead loss. The farmer, therefore, paid at the rate of $7.57 a bushel for his clover seed. Not only was he paying an exorbitant price, but he would have wasted his time and his land in sowing seed the greater part of which would not have sprouted.

The seed industry in the United States has grown to enormous proportions. Hundreds of thousands of acres are devoted to seed raising. Some of the warehouses cover an area of from five to ten acres. Millions of packets of seed are sent out annually. Some firms receive about 10,000 orders a day. That the Government stands ready promptly to test seeds for American farmers, so far as its laboratory facilities will permit, is, therefore, a matter of great public interest.

Many millions of dollars are involved annually in the seed trade of America.

Among other things the Government is interested in keeping the seeds of the dodder from getting root in American soil. The danger of the spread of this pest is great. A single dodder will attack and destroy one clover plant after another, until it has established its malign dominion over an area of several square feet. The Department seeks to impress upon farmers the false economy in saving a few cents per acre on seed and as a result stocking the land with destructive weeds. In a number of samples of red clover seed tested in the laboratory, over 20,000 seeds of weeds found to the pound, and one lot the number of weed seeds to the pound was 27,700, mostly green foxtail and plantain.

The beet-sugar industry has grown to such proportions and the value of securing good seed is so urgent that the Bureau of Plant Industry has made special arrangements to make tests on an extensive scale of sugar-beet seed for purity and germination, and also to make delicate moisture determinations.

This service is rendered without charge. When moisture determinations are wanted. the samples must be sent in glass or tin air-tight packages.—Saturday Evening Post.